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Der Präsident des Europäischen Patentamts;
Im Auftrag

For the President of the European Patent Office

Le Président de l'Office européen des brevets
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Circuit and method for temperature tracing of devices including an element of
chalcogenic material, in particular phase change memory devices

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CIRCUIT AND METHOD FOR TEMPERATURE TRACING OF DEVICES
INCLUDING AN ELEMENT OF CHALCOGENIC MATERIAL, IN
PARTICULAR PHASE CHANGE MEMORY DEVICES

5 The present invention relates to a circuit and a
method for temperature tracing of devices including an
element of chalcogenic material, in particular of phase
change memory devices.

 As is known, phase change memory devices comprise
10 storage elements made of a class of materials that have
the unique property of being reversibly switchable
from one phase to another with measurable distinct
electrical properties associated with each phase. For
example, these materials may change between an
15 amorphous disordered phase and a crystalline, or
polycrystalline, ordered phase. A material property
that may change and provide a signature for each phase
is the material resistivity, which is considerably
different in the two states.

20 Specific materials that may be suitably used in
phase change cells are alloys of elements of the VI
group of the periodic table as Te or Se, also called
chalcogenides or chalcogenic materials. Therefore,
hereinafter, the term "chalcogenic materials" is used

to indicate all materials switchable between at least two different phases where they have different electrical properties (resistances) and include thus the elements of the VI group of the periodic table and
5 their alloys.

The presently most promising chalcogenide is an alloy of Ge, Sb and Te ($\text{Ge}_2\text{Sb}_2\text{Te}_5$) which is already widely used for storing information in overwriteable optical disks.

10 As indicated, for microelectronics applications, the interesting parameter is resistivity that varies of two or more orders of magnitude when the material transforms from the amorphous phase (more resistive) to the crystalline phase (more conductive) and vice versa.
15 Furthermore, in the amorphous state, the resistivity depends heavily from temperature, with resistivity changes of one order of magnitude every 100°C , with a similar behavior to P-type semiconductors.

Phase change may be obtained by locally increasing
20 the temperature. Under 150°C , both phases are stable. Over 200°C , nucleation of crystallites is fast and if the material is kept to the crystallization temperature for a sufficient time, it changes phase and becomes crystalline. In order to change the phase back to the

amorphous state, the chalcogenide temperature is brought over the melting point (about 600°C) and rapidly reduced.

From an electrical point of view, it is possible to reach both critical temperatures (crystallization and melting temperatures) using an electric current flow through a resistive electrode in contact or close proximity with the chalcogenic material and heating the material by Joule effect.

10 A phase-change storage element 1 based on the above is shown in Figure 1, and comprises a resistive electrode forming a heater 2 and a chalcogenic region 3. The chalcogenic region 3 is generally in the crystalline state to allow good current flow. A portion
15 of the chalcogenic region 3 is in direct contact with the heater 2 and forms a phase change portion 4.

By passing an electrical current of suitable value through the heater 2, it is possible to selectively heat the phase change portion 4 to the crystallization
20 or melting temperatures and cause a phase change.

Figure 2 shows the plots of the required temperature versus time when a phase change from the crystalline to the amorphous state is desired (curve A) and a phase change from the amorphous to the

crystalline state is desired (curve B). T_m indicates the melting temperature and T_x indicates the temperature at which crystallization begins. As shown, amorphization requires a short time (reset pulse) but a high temperature; furthermore the material should be cooled in a very short time (t_1) to maintain the atomic disorder and avoid recrystallization of the material. Crystallization requires a longer time t_2 (also called set pulse) to allow nucleation and crystal growing.

10 The state of the chalcogenic region 3 may be read by applying a sufficiently small voltage so as not to cause a sensible heating and measuring the current passing through it. Since the current is proportional to the conductance of the chalcogenic material, it is possible to discriminate between the two states.

15 In practice, a phase-change storage element 1 can be considered as a resistor which conducts a different current according to its phase. In particular, the following convention is adopted: a phase-change storage element 1 is defined as "set" when, once appropriately biased, it conducts a detectable current (this condition may be associated to a logic condition "1"), and as "reset" when, in the same biasing conditions, it does not conduct current or conducts a much lower

current than a cell that is set (logic condition "0").

The use of phase-change storage elements has already been proposed in memory arrays formed by a plurality of memory cells arranged in rows and columns.

5 In order to prevent the memory cells from being affected by noise caused by adjacent memory cells, generally each memory cell comprises a phase-change storage element and a selection element, such as an MOS transistor or a diode.

10 For example, Figure 3 shows a memory array 8 formed by a plurality of memory cells 10 arranged along rows and columns and connected to bit lines 11 (parallel to the columns of the memory array 8) and word lines 12 (parallel to the rows of the memory array
15 8).

Each memory cell 10 is formed by a memory element 15 having the basic structure of the phase-change storage element 1 of Figure 2 and a selection element 16 formed by an NMOS transistor.

20 In each memory cell 10, the gate terminal of the NMOS transistor 16 is connected to the respective word line 12 having address WL_{n-1} , WL_n , ..., the source terminal (during normal operation of the memory array 8, namely during reading or setting and resetting

operations) is connected to a ground region 18, and the drain terminal is connected to a first terminal of the respective memory element 15. A second terminal of the memory element 15 is connected to a respective bit line 11 having address BL_{n-1} , BL_n , BL_{n+1} , ...

In the memory array 8 it is possible to program or read a single memory cell 10 by appropriately biasing the bit line 11 and the word line 12 connected thereto. All the bit lines 11 and all the word lines 12 that are not addressed must be grounded.

In particular, for selecting the cell 10 connected to word line 12 having address WL_{n-1} and bit line 11 having address BL_{n-1} , appropriate voltages are applied to line BL_{n-1} and to line WL_{n-1} to have a first voltage $V1$ at one terminal of the memory element 15 and a second voltage $V2$ at a second terminal of memory element 15.

When cell 10 is to be written, the cell is fed with a current pulse I the length and amplitude whereof depend on the set or reset operation desired. Figure 4 shows indicatively the length and amplitude of the writing pulse I_s and I_R in the two cases.

Since, as above said, heating of a chalcogenic element causes a phase transition by the Joule effect, when the storage element is flown by a current, there

is a strict relationship among temperature, current and material state.

In particular, Figure 5 shows the change in resistance as a function of the temperature and current. In particular, Figure 5 shows three curves C, D and E obtained at temperatures T_1 , T_2 and T_3 , wherein $T_1 < T_2 < T_3$. In Figure 5, I_{s1} , I_{s2} and I_{s3} are the current values at which a cell 10 changes from the reset to the set state respectively at temperatures T_1 , T_2 , T_3 and I_{R1} , I_{R2} and I_{R3} are the current values at which a cell 10 changes from the set to the reset state respectively at temperatures T_1 , T_2 , T_3 .

As may be seen, the resistance R of a chalcogenic element is strongly dependent on the temperature in the amorphous (reset) state (high resistance portions of the curves) and is scarcely variable along with temperature in the crystalline (set) state (low resistance portions of the curves).

Furthermore, a set operation carried out at temperature T_1 requires a higher current (I_{s1}) than a set operation carried out at temperature T_3 (I_{s3}). Moreover, a reset operation carried out at temperature T_1 requires a higher current (I_{R1}) than a set operation carried out at temperature T_3 (I_{R3}). The little

difference between the maximum set current I_{S1} and the minimum reset current I_{R3} is however problematic, as below explained.

In the absence of any information on the temperature, in order to ensure writing of a cell in a required temperature range (thus including the minimum temperature of the range, e.g. T_1), the write current I_s must be set equal to the maximum value required (in the example, I_{S1}).

However, selecting a fixed, predetermined write current value I_{S1} , involves the risk that the write current is too close or even exceeds the minimum writing current to bring the cell in the reset state (here, I_{R3}). In presence of a high temperature, a set operation carried out with current I_{S1} could even cause a reset of the cell.

Thus, the writing operation is hardly controllable.

Furthermore, if the reset current I_R in the required temperature range is a fixed value, this should be selected not lower than I_{R1} to ensure reset of the cell in all conditions, also at low temperature. However, the application of a high current value such as I_{R1} can cause, at a high temperature, a over-

resetting of the cell.

Moreover, since there is a direct proportionality between the duration of the set pulse and the amplitude of the reset pulse, using the maximum current I_{R3} during
5 the reset operation implies increasing the set time t_s during the set operation. This increase would cause an unacceptable increase of the set time and thus in the requirements regarding the device writing speed.

In view of the above, it is clear that writing
10 requires a system responsible to the existing temperature; specifically, it is desired a reference that is able to trace the setting and resetting currents as a function of the existing temperature. Thereby, the resistivity values at the end of writing
15 do not depend on the room temperature but only on the energy furnished to the chalcogenic material during writing, thus allowing a precise writing.

The information about the room temperature is important also during reading, as below explained.
20 Reading may be carried out by setting voltages V_1 and V_2 applied to the terminals of the cell 10 (Figure 3) and detecting the current I flowing in the cell. The current I flowing in the cell is given by:

$$I = (V_1 - V_2) / R(T)$$

Neglecting the influence of the heater 2 on the resistance variations, since the heater 2 is of an alloy, such as TiSiN, having low temperature coefficient, if V_1 and V_2 are constant with the
5 temperature, the current I depends on the resistance with a law of inverse proportionality and thus on the temperature in a directly proportional way.

However, as above indicated, the resistivity of chalcogenic materials decreases with an inverse
10 proportionality law with the temperature, modifying the electrical features of the cells.

Figure 6 shows indicatively the plots of the current versus voltage in case of a set cell (curve F) and of a reset cell (curve G) at a nominal temperature, e.g. 25°C. Figure 6 also shows the plot of a reference
15 line (curve H), intermediate between the set and reset curves F, G, that may be used as a reference during reading to discriminate the set or reset state of a cell. $V_r = V_1 - V_2$ is the reading voltage applied across
20 the cell; I_{rS} is the current read at the reading voltage V_r for a set cell; I_{rR} is the current read at the reading voltage V_r for a reset cell and I_{REF} is the reference current at the reading voltage V_r .

Figure 6 also shows a shifted reset shift curve G'

for a reset cell in case of temperature increase (corresponding, as above discussed, to a resistance decrease).

If a cell is read at the fixed predetermined
5 reading voltage V_r using a fixed current I_{REF} (which means that the reference curve H is maintained fixed), the shifted reset curve G' at high temperature approaches the reference curve H , causing a strong reduction in the absolute current difference
10 $|I_{REF} - I_{rR}|$.

The set curve F has an opposite, although less pronounced, behavior and, at high temperature, it approaches the reference curve H , also causing a reduction in the absolute current difference
15 $|I_{REF} - I_{rS}|$.

The reduction in the current differences $|I_{REF} - I_{rR}|$ and $|I_{REF} - I_{rS}|$ thus reduces the security margin necessary to correctly discriminate the content of the cell and thus causes a reduction in robustness
20 and reliability and increases reading time of the memory device.

Therefore, also the reading operation requires an information on the temperature; in particular a system is desired which has a sufficient sensing margin for

all operating temperatures so as to have electrical quantities fitted to the existing temperature conditions.

Similar considerations are applicable if the cell
5 is read by forcing a preset current value in the cell and then reading the voltage drop $V_1 - V_2$ or one between V_1 , V_2 .

The object of the invention is thus to provide a temperature detection circuit and method that solve the
10 above problem.

According to the present invention, there are provided an electronic device and a method for tracing temperature in an electronic device, as defined in claims 1 and 14, respectively.

15 For the understanding of the present invention, preferred embodiments are now described, purely as a non-limitative example, with reference to the enclosed drawings, wherein:

- Figure 1 shows the basic structure of a known
20 chalcogenic element;

- Figure 2 illustrates the characteristic current-voltage of a phase change material;

- Figure 3 shows the architecture of a memory array using the chalcogenic storage element of Figure 1 as a

PCM memory element;

- Figure 4 plots the current pulses necessary for causing switching of the chalcogenic element;

- Figure 5 shows the switching of resistance at 5 different current values in dependence of the temperature;

- Figure 6 shows the plot of the current versus voltage for different states of the chalcogenic element;

10 - Figure 7 shows a simplified block diagram of a temperature tracing circuit for phase change memory cells according to the invention;

- Figure 8 is a block diagram of a temperature tracing circuit used in a memory device for generating 15 biasing voltages;

- Figure 9 is a block diagram of a different embodiment of a temperature tracing circuit used in a memory device for generating biasing voltages;

- Figure 10 is circuit diagram of another 20 embodiment of the temperature tracing circuit according to the invention;

- Figure 11 is simplified diagram of an embodiment of the block diagram of Figure 8;

- Figure 12 is simplified diagram of an embodiment

of the temperature tracing circuit of Figure 9;

- Figure 13 is circuit diagram of an embodiment of a block of the temperature tracing circuit of Figure 9;

- Figure 14 is circuit diagram of another
5 embodiment of the block of Figure 13;

- Figure 15 is a simplified block diagram of a memory device incorporating a temperature tracing circuit according to the invention;

- Figure 16 is a simplified circuit diagram of a
10 biasing circuit incorporated in the memory device of Figure 15;

- Figures 17 and 18 show the current-versus-temperature plots for the biasing circuit of Figure 16;

- Figure 19 is a simplified circuit diagram of a
15 biasing circuit incorporated in the memory device of Figure 15; and

- Figure 20 shows the voltage-versus-temperature plot for the biasing circuit of Figure 19.

The invention resides in providing voltage or
20 current references dependent on the temperature using a temperature sensor formed by a chalcogenic element. In particular, the chalcogenic element has a resistance variable with temperature with the same law as a phase-change storage element.

To this end, the temperature sensor furnishes an electrical quantity that reproduces the relationship between the resistance of phase change memory cells and the temperature; such electrical quantity can then be
5 then processed and in case converted into digital so as to trace and modify the various electrical quantities required for writing and reading the cell to adapt the electrical quantities to the existing temperature.

The sensor may be formed by a network of
10 chalcogenic elements of the type shown in Figure 2 that should be programmed with precision (set, reset or programmed in an intermediate state) so as to furnish quantities $V(T)$ and/or $I(T)$ tracing with a proportional law the variations in the memory cells.

15 The network may comprise a plurality of chalcogenic elements connected in parallel and/or in series.

The sensor may be arranged in an area of the memory device near the array, so as to undergo the same variations due to temperature as the memory cells.

20 A temperature tracing circuit 23 according to the invention is shown in Figure 7, wherein a temperature sensor element is formed by a chalcogenic element having the structure shown in Figure 2 and represented as a chalcogenic resistor 20. The chalcogenic resistor

20 generates an output quantity (output voltage $V(T)$ or output current $I(T)$) variable with temperature with the same law as the memory element 15. For example, a constant current is fed to the chalcogenic resistor 20 and the voltage $V(T)$ across the chalcogenic resistor 20 is detected. Or a constant voltage is applied to the chalcogenic resistor 20 and the current $I(T)$ flowing through the chalcogenic resistor 20 is detected. In the alternative, the chalcogenic resistor 20 is part of a voltage or current source with any known structure.

The output quantity, $V(T)$ or $I(T)$, is fed to a processor block 21 that processes it and generates at the output an electrical quantity $F[R(T)]$ as requested for the biasing circuitry of the memory array 8 of Figure 3. The electrical quantity $F[R(T)]$ is thus tracing with temperature. For example, the electrical quantity $F[R(T)]$ may be the first voltage V_1 supplied to a terminal of the memory cell 10 through a bit line BL_i .

Figure 8 shows a more detailed block diagram of an embodiment of the temperature tracing circuit 23 according to the present invention.

Here, the output signal of chalcogenic resistor 20 (either a voltage $V(T)$ or a current $I(T)$) is fed to an

analog-to-digital converter 25 that converts the output signal $V(T)$, $I(T)$ into a digital string CB correlated with the existing temperature; the digital string CB is fed to a reference voltage generator 26 to configure
5 it; the reference voltage generator 26 generates a reference voltage V_{REF} fed to biasing circuits 27 of the memory array 8 of Figure 3.

In addition or in the alternative, the digital string CB is fed to a reference current generator 28 to
10 configure it; the reference current generator 28 generates a reference current I_{REF} fed to the biasing circuits 27.

According to Figure 9, the A/D converter 25 may be omitted; in this case, the output quantities (output
15 voltage and/or current $V_{o1}(T)$, $V_{o2}(T)$, $I_{o1}(T)$, $I_{o2}(T)$ of the chalcogenic resistor 20) are directly supplied to the reference voltage generator 26 and/or the reference current generator 28.

Figure 10 shows another embodiment of a temperature
20 tracing circuit 23 according to the invention. Here, the temperature tracing circuit 23 is implemented by a regulator formed by an operational amplifier 30 having a non-inverting input fed with a temperature-stable voltage V_{BG} (e.g. generated by a band-gap circuit, non

shown) and an inverting input connected to an intermediate node 31. A standard resistor 32 is connected between intermediate node 31 and ground; the chalcogenic resistor 20 is connected between
5 intermediate node 31 and an output node 33.

The output of the operational amplifier 30 drives the gate of an output transistor 34 coupled between a power supply line 35 at VDD and the output node 33.

As obvious to those skilled in the art, the voltage
10 VREF at output node 33 is given by:

$$VREF = VBG(1+RCALC/R)$$

wherein RCALC is the (temperature-variable) resistance of the chalcogenic resistor 20 and R is the resistance of the standard resistor 32.

15 Output voltage VREF increases with temperature with the same law as RCALC, neglecting the mismatch between the temperature variation of RCALC with respect to R.

In the embodiment of Figure 10, if standard resistor 32 is exchanged with the chalcogenic resistor
20 20 (that is, the chalcogenic resistor 20 is coupled between the intermediate node 31 and ground and the standard resistor 32 is coupled between the intermediate node 31 and the output node 33), the reference voltage VREF is given by:

$$VREF = VBG(1+R/RCALC)$$

thus, giving rise to a relationship of inverse proportionality.

Figure 11 shows an implementation of the
5 temperature tracing circuit 23 of Figure 8, wherein the
reference voltage generator 26 is implemented as a
regulator, with a topology similar to that of Figure
10. In detail, the reference voltage generator 26
comprises an operational amplifier 30a receiving, at
10 the non-inverting input, a temperature-stable voltage
VBG and having the inverting input connected to an
intermediate node 31a. A standard resistor 32a having a
resistance R1 is connected between intermediate node
31a and ground; a controllable resistor 35a having a
15 variable resistance R2 is connected between
intermediate node 31a and the output node 33a.

The output of the operational amplifier 30a is
connected to the gate of an output transistor 34a
coupled between the power supply line and the output
20 node 33a.

The resistance R2 of the controllable resistor 35a
is controlled by digital string CB generated by A/D
converter 25; A/D converter 25 receives an electrical
quantity $F[R(T)]$ by the chalcogenic resistor 20.

In this case, the voltage VREF at output node 33a is given by:

$$VREF = VBG(1+R2/R1)$$

wherein the value of R2, being controlled by the
5 digital string CB, varies with temperature.

Thus, also in this case, the reference voltage VREF varies, in a first approximation, with the same law as the resistance of the chalcogenic resistor 20.

In an alternative to the embodiment of Figure 11,
10 the resistor coupled between intermediate node 31a and ground is variable and controlled by A/D converter 25; the feedback resistor coupled between the intermediate and the output nodes 31a, 33a is instead fixed.

Figure 12 shows an implementation of the block
15 diagram of Figure 9, wherein the reference voltage generator 26 is implemented as a regulator, analogously to Figure 11. Also here, the reference voltage generator 26 comprises an operational amplifier 30a having the non-inverting input connected to the output
20 of the chalcogenic resistor 20 and the inverting input connected to an intermediate node 31a. A first standard resistor 40 having a resistance R1 is connected between intermediate node 31a and ground; a second standard resistor 41 having a resistance R2 is connected between

intermediate node 31a and the output node 33a.

The operational amplifier 30a receives output voltage $V(T)$ from the chalcogenic resistor 20, preferably in the reset state; as indicated above, voltage $V(T)$ varies with temperature with the same relationship as the phase-change memory element 15 of figure 3. Output voltage $V(T)$ is amplified so as to output reference voltage $V_{REF} = V(T)(1+R_1/R_2)$ that may be used as V_1 to bias the bit line of a selected memory cell 15 (Figure 3).

Figure 13 shows an embodiment of a current generator 28, usable in the block diagram of Figure 9.

In detail, the current generator 28, of a per se known topology, comprises a first current mirror 45 and a second current mirror 46. The first current mirror 45 includes two NMOS transistors 47, 48; NMOS transistor 47 has source terminal connected to ground through chalcogenic resistor 20; NMOS transistor 48 has shorted drain and gate terminals. The second current mirror 45 includes three PMOS transistors 49, 50, 51, whereof PMOS transistor 49 is connected between supply line 52 and the drain terminal of NMOS transistor 47; PMOS transistor 50 has shorted drain and gate terminals and is connected between supply line 52 and the drain

terminal of NMOS transistor 47; PMOS transistor 51 is an output transistor and supplies reference current IREF from its drain terminal. Therefore, reference current IREF, mirroring the current flowing in the chalcogenic resistor 20 and thus having the same or a proportional amplitude (depending from the aspect ratio of the current mirrors) depends on temperature with the same law as the current flowing in the chalcogenic resistor 20.

10 In an alternative embodiment, shown in Figure 14, the output transistor (now indicated at 53) is of NMOS type and is part of the first current mirror 47; in this case, PMOS transistor 51 is not provided, and the output transistor 53 draws a reference current IREF
15 from the output.

Figure 15 shows a block diagram of a memory device 55. As shown, the temperature tracing circuit 23, implemented according to any embodiment above discussed, supplies an output reference quantity VREF, IREF to biasing circuit 27, that generates a biasing quantity $F_b[R(T)]$; the biasing quantity $F_b[R(T)]$ is then fed, through a column decoder 55, to a selected bit line BLi. A row decoder 56 generates a suitable biasing voltage on a selected word line WLi to address

a selected memory cell 10.

As indicated, the electrical quantity $Fb[R(T)]$ may be a biasing current I_b starting from reference current I_{REF} ; in this case, the temperature tracing circuit 23 may have the structure of Figure 9, including the chalcogenic resistor 20 and the reference current generator 28. The reference current generator 28 may be implemented as shown in Figure 14; the biasing circuit 27 may be implemented as shown in Figure 16.

According to Figure 16, the biasing circuit 27 comprises a constant current source 60 and a subtracting node 61. The constant current source 60, for example a band-gap current source, generates a temperature-independent current I_1 , fed to subtracting node 61. The subtracting node 61 also receives the reference current I_{REF} supplied by the temperature tracing circuit 23 (shown as a current source, for sake of simplicity) and outputs a biasing current I_b given by:

$$I_b = I_1 - I_{REF}$$

Since the reference current I_{REF} increases with temperature, as shown in the plot of Figure 17, the biasing current I_b generated by the biasing circuit 27 is inversely proportional to the temperature, as

visible from Figure 18.

Therefore, with reference again to Figure 15, biasing current I_b is fed, by the column decoder 55, to a selected bit line BL_i to allow a write operation. In this way, the memory cell 10 to be written is fed with a writing current (set or reset current I_s or I_R) that is variable with temperature in an inverse law, to take into account the different needed set and reset current, as discussed in detail with reference to Figure 5. Furthermore, by varying the temperature-independent current I_1 depending of the specific write operation to be carried out (set or reset), it is possible to maintain constant the current gap $I_R - I_s$ independently from the existing temperature.

The biasing quantity $F_b[R(T)]$ in Figure 15 may also be a voltage, in particular voltage V_1 of Figure 3, starting from reference current I_{REF} ; also in this case, the temperature tracing circuit 23 may have the structure of Figure 9, including the chalcogenic resistor 20 and the reference current generator 28, and the reference current generator 28 may be implemented as shown in Figure 14. Here, the biasing circuit 27 may be implemented as shown in Figure 19.

According to Figure 19, the biasing circuit 27

comprises a constant current source 70, a subtracting node 71, an A/D converter 72 and a voltage regulator 73.

The constant current source 70, for example a band-
5 gap current source, generates a temperature-independent current I1, fed to subtracting node 71. The subtracting node 71 further receives the reference current IREF from the temperature tracing circuit 23 (also here, shown as a current source) and outputs a control
10 current I2 given by:

$$I2 = I1 - IREF$$

Control current I2 is fed to A/D converter 72 that generates a digital string CB used to control a variable resistor 74 of the regulator 73. Here the
15 regulator 73 has the same structure shown in Figure 11, thus the variable resistor 74 is a feedback resistor of an operational amplifier 75. Therefore, analogously to Figure 11, the output voltage of regulator 73, biasing voltage V1, varies with temperature with a behavior
20 similar to the chalcogenic resistor 20, as shown in Figure 20.

Biasing voltage V1 is then fed, by the column decoder 55 of Figure 15, to a selected bit line BLi to allow a write operation of the selected memory cell 10.

During reading, a fixed biasing voltage V_1 is applied to a cell 10 to be read (Figure 3) and the current I flowing in the cell is compared with a reference current I_{REF} tracing in temperature, generated e.g. by reference current generator 28 of Figure 14 and using a resetted chalcogenic resistor 20. Thereby, the reference current I_{REF} has a variation with temperature similar to that of a resetted cell, biased by a constant voltage, and the difference $|I_{REF} - I_{rS}|$ is kept practically constant. According to this solution, the reference current I_{REF} follows the behavior of the cells that undergo a higher change with temperature (resetted cells) instead of the behavior of setted cells, whose resistance varies less with temperature, thus ensuring only a small reduction in the sense margin with temperature.

The described embodiments have the following advantages. The temperature tracing circuits using a chalcogenic resistor with the same structure as the memory elements 15 of the array supply reference voltage or reference current signals V_{REF} , I_{REF} that vary with temperature with directly proportional or inversely proportional relationship to the memory elements 15. A suitable processing of the reference

voltage VREF or reference current IREF allows to select writing currents such as to maintain constant the writing current gap $I_R - I_S$. Thus writing is much more controllable and there is no more the risk that the set
5 current be too narrow to the reset current.

Since the biasing voltages supplied to the memory array are fittedly correlated to the temperature (room temperature during writing), only the necessary energy is supplied for obtaining predetermined set or reset
10 resistances, referred to the standard temperature of 27°C; thereby the distributions of the resistances in the set and reset state are narrower for memories of big dimensions (multimegabit).

By virtue of the described technique, the reduction
15 in the safe margin for sensing is small, as above discussed, so that the memory device is more robust, more reliable and requires lower reading times.

The chalcogenic material has a high response speed following temperature changes, with quicker thermal
20 transients than electrical transients; thus it is possible to have temperature sensors operating in real time.

It is clear that numerous variations and modifications may be made to the circuit and method

described and illustrated herein, all falling within the scope of the invention as defined in the attached claims.

In particular, it is stressed that a chalcogenic
5 element may be used for temperature tracing also in
electronic devices of different type, e.g. in sensing
circuits and other type memories that require detection
of temperature and regulation of any quantity based on
the local temperature of the device and already include
10 a chalcogenic material element.

CLAIMS

1. An electronic device comprising an element of chalcogenic material (15) and a temperature detection circuit (23), characterized in that said temperature
5 detection circuit (23) includes a resistor (20) of chalcogenic material.

2. A device according to claim 1, wherein said element of chalcogenic material (15) is a phase change storage element (15) and said device is a phase change
10 non-volatile memory device.

3. A device according to claim 2, wherein said resistor (20) of chalcogenic material and said phase change storage element (15) have the same structure.

4. A device according to any of claims 1-3, wherein
15 said resistor (20) of chalcogenic material generates an electrical quantity $(V(T), I(T))$ tracing with temperature, further comprising a processor (21) receiving said electrical quantity and generating a reference quantity (V_{REF}, I_{REF}) tracing with
20 temperature.

5. A device according to claim 4, wherein said processor (21) comprises an analog-to-digital converter (25) receiving said electrical quantity and generating a digital word (CB) correlated to temperature and a

reference quantity generator (26; 28) receiving said digital word and generating said reference quantity.

6. A device according to claim 5, wherein said reference quantity generator (26) is a voltage
5 regulator having a control input receiving said digital word (CB).

7. A device according to claim 6, wherein said voltage regulator (26) comprises an operational
amplifier (30a) having an input and an output and a
10 feedback resistive network (32a, 35a) connected between said input and said output of said operational amplifier; said resistive network comprising a controllable resistor (35a) having a control input receiving said digital word (CB).

15 8. A device according to claim 4, wherein said processor (21) comprises a voltage regulator (Figure 12).

9. A device according to claim 8, wherein said voltage regulator comprises an operational amplifier
20 (30a) having a first and a second input and an output and a feedback resistive network (40, 41) connected between said first input and said output of said operational amplifier, said second input of said operational amplifier being connected to said resistor

(20) of chalcogenic material.

10. A device according to claim 4, wherein said processor (21) comprises a current source (28).

11. A device according to any of claims 4-10,
5 further comprising a biasing circuit (27) receiving said reference quantity (V_{REF} , I_{REF}) and generating a biasing quantity (I_b , V_l) for said phase change storage element (15).

12. A device according to claim 11, wherein said
10 biasing circuit (27) is connected to said phase change storage element (15) through a write selection circuit (55) to supply said phase change memory cell with a current pulse (I_b) the amplitude whereof varies with temperature.

15 13. A device according to any of claims 1-3, wherein said temperature detection circuit (23) comprises an operational amplifier (30) having an input and an output and a feedback resistive network (20, 32) connected between said input and said output of said
20 operational amplifier; said resistive network including said resistor (20) of chalcogenic material.

14. A method for tracing temperature in an electronic device including an element (15) of chalcogenic material, characterized by detecting an

existing temperature through a resistor (20) of chalcogenic material.

15. A method according to claim 14, wherein said electronic device comprises a phase change storage
5 element (15).

16. A method according to claim 15, wherein the phase change storage device is a non-volatile memory, further comprising the steps of:

generating an electrical quantity tracing with
10 temperature; and

processing said electrical quantity to generate a reference quantity tracing with temperature.

17. A method according to claim 16, wherein said step of generating comprises generating one between a
15 reference voltage and a reference current.

18. A method according to claim 17, comprising the steps of:

generating a write biasing current correlated to said reference current;

20 supplying said write biasing current to said phase change memory cell.

19. A method according to claim 17, comprising the steps of:

generating a read biasing voltage correlated to

said reference current;

supplying said read biasing current to said phase
change memory cell.

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ABSTRACT

A phase change memory includes a temperature sensor having a resistance variable with temperature with the
5 same law as a phase-change storage element. The temperature sensor is formed by a resistor (20) of chalcogenic material furnishing an electrical quantity ($V(T)$, $I(T)$) that reproduces the relationship between the resistance of a phase change memory cell and
10 temperature; the electrical quantity is processed (21) so as to generate reference quantities as necessary for writing and reading the memory cells. The chalcogenic resistor (20) has the same structure as a memory cell and is programmed with precision, preferably in the
15 reset state.

Figure 7

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Fig.1

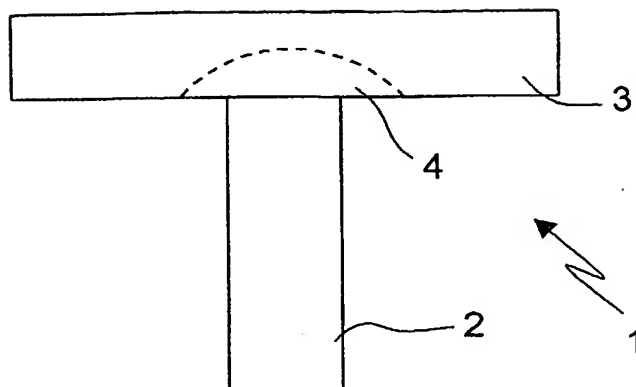


Fig.2

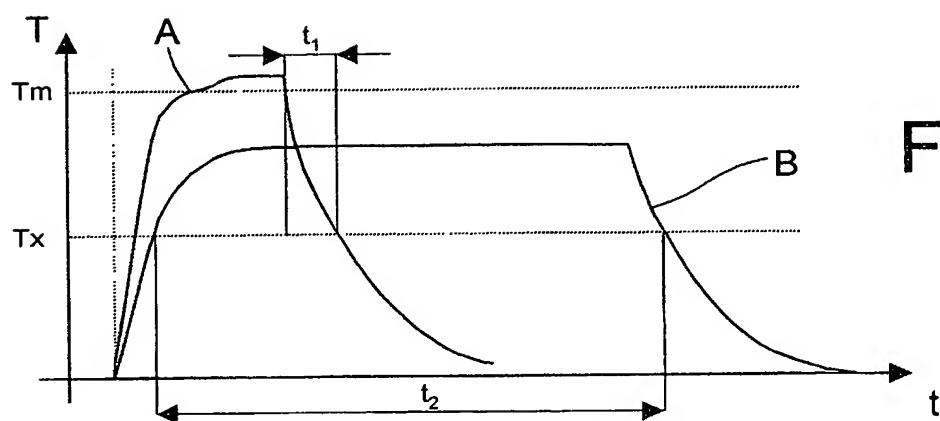
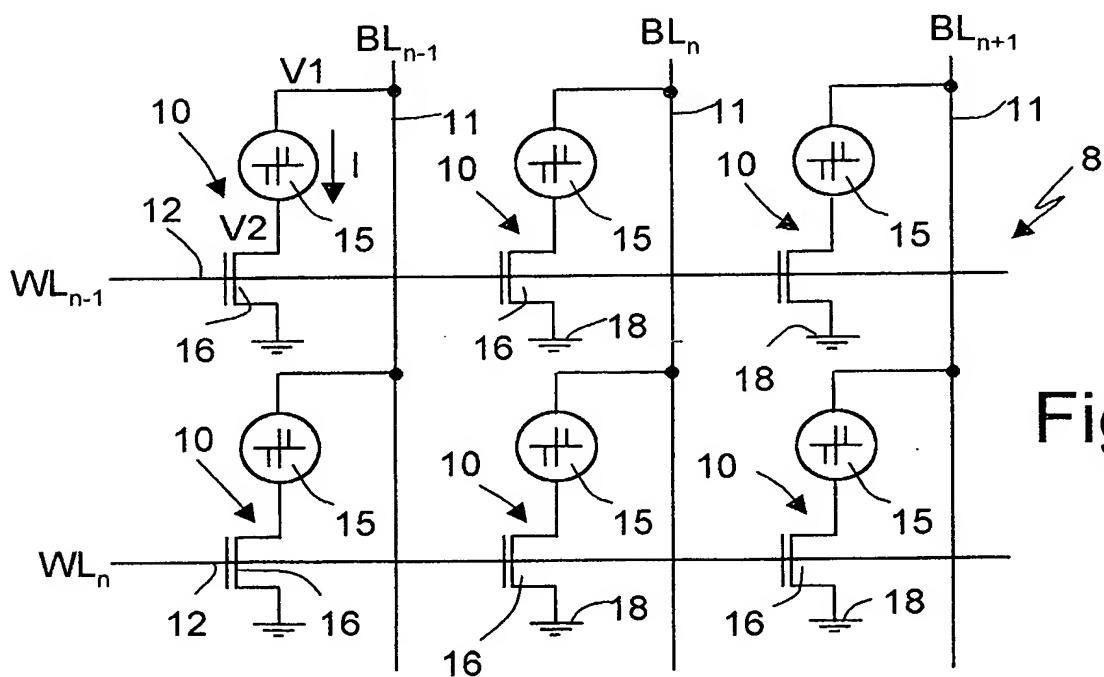


Fig.3



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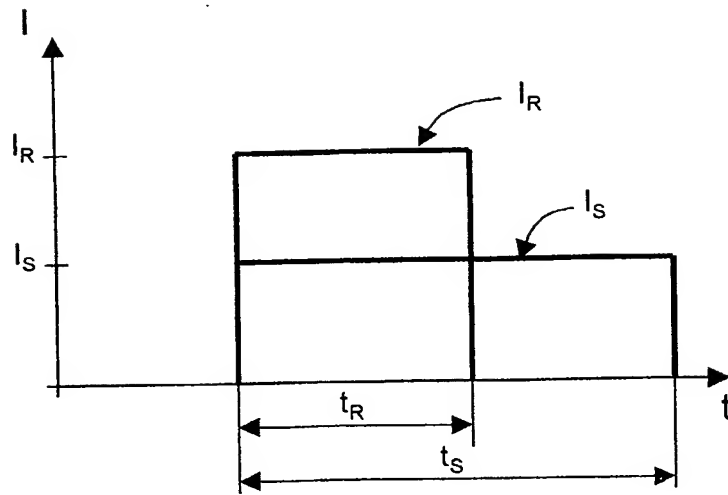


Fig.4

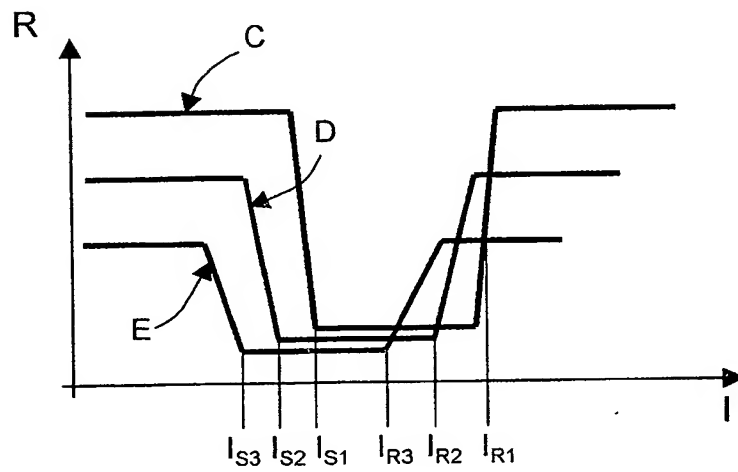


Fig.5

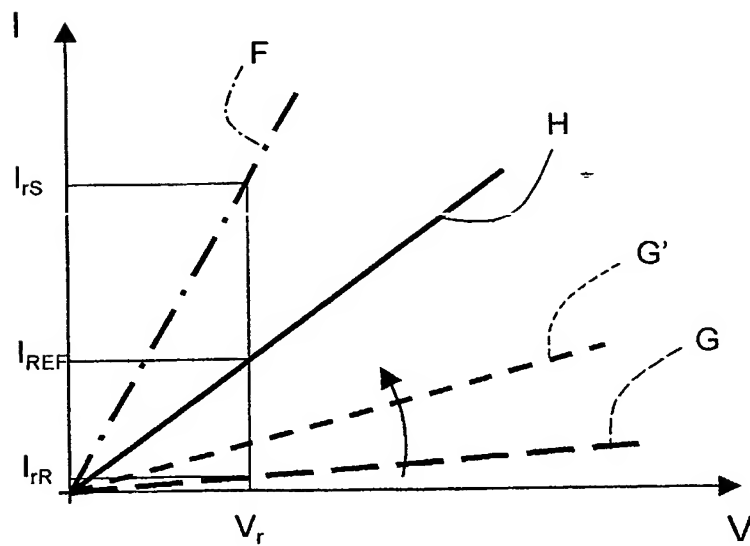


Fig.6

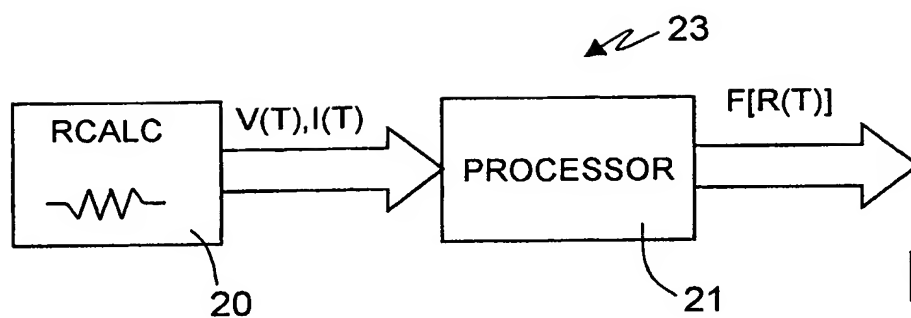


Fig. 7

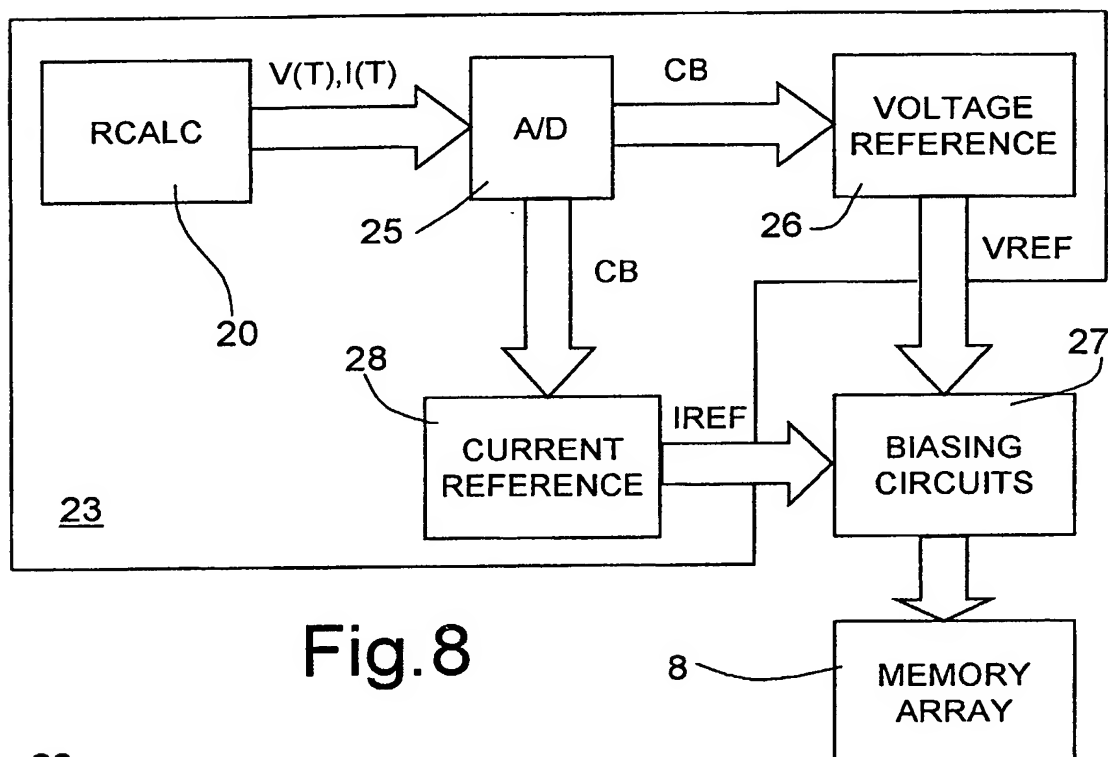


Fig. 8

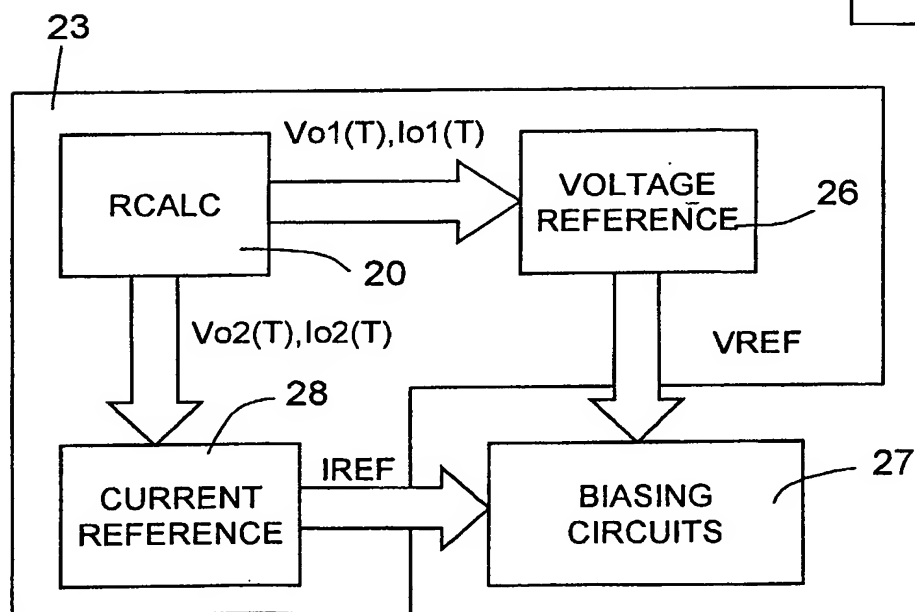


Fig. 9

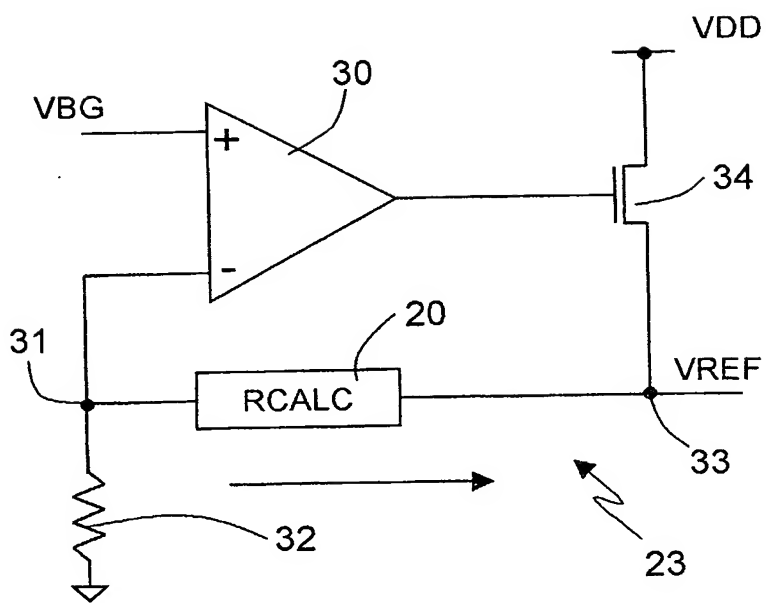


Fig. 10

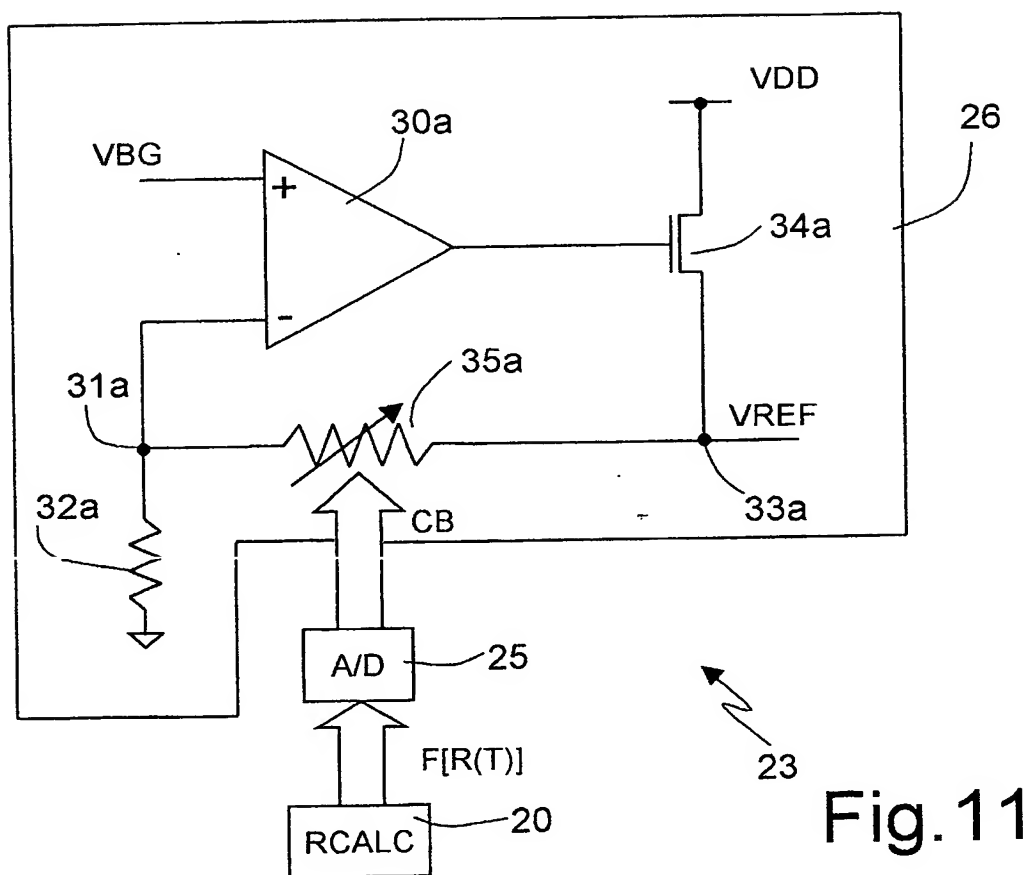


Fig. 11

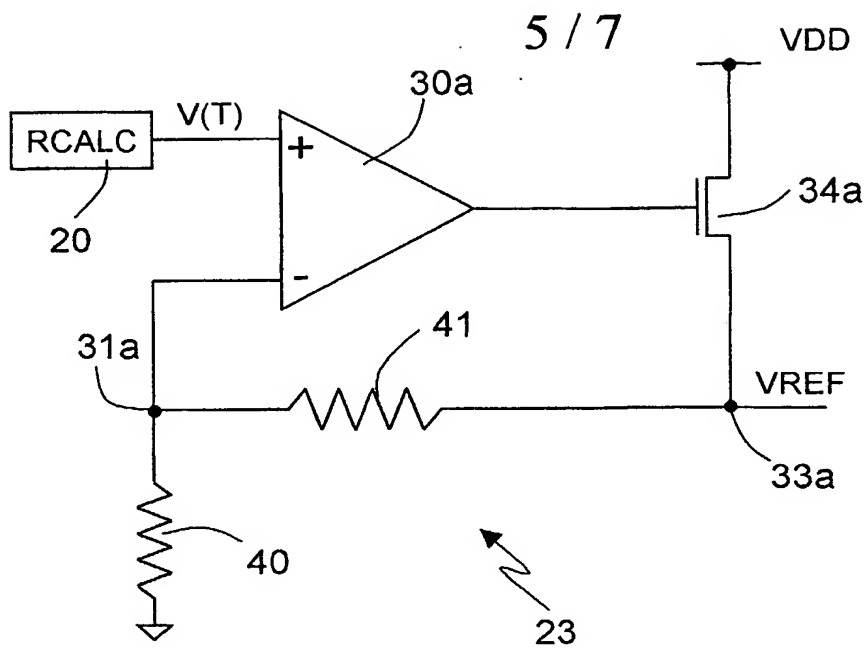


Fig.12

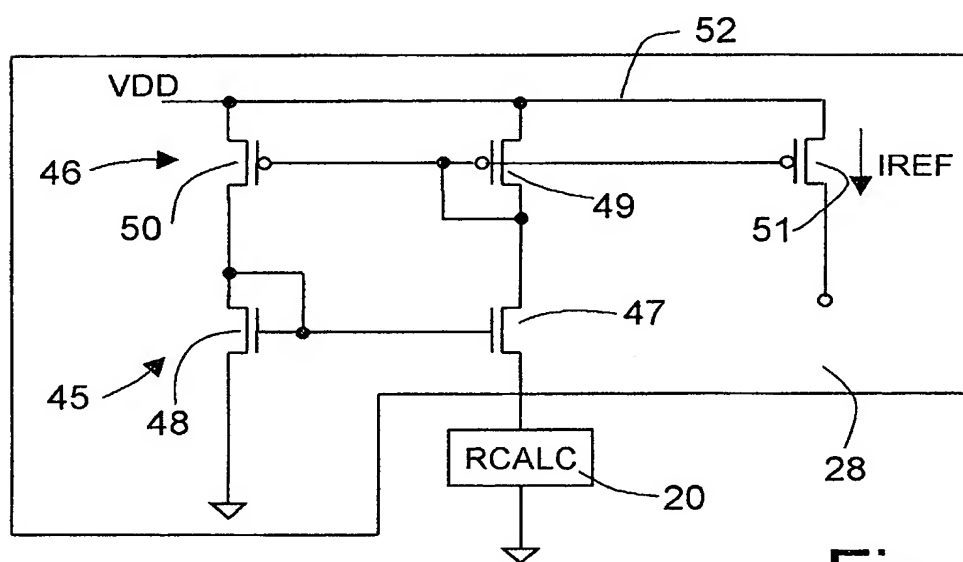


Fig.13

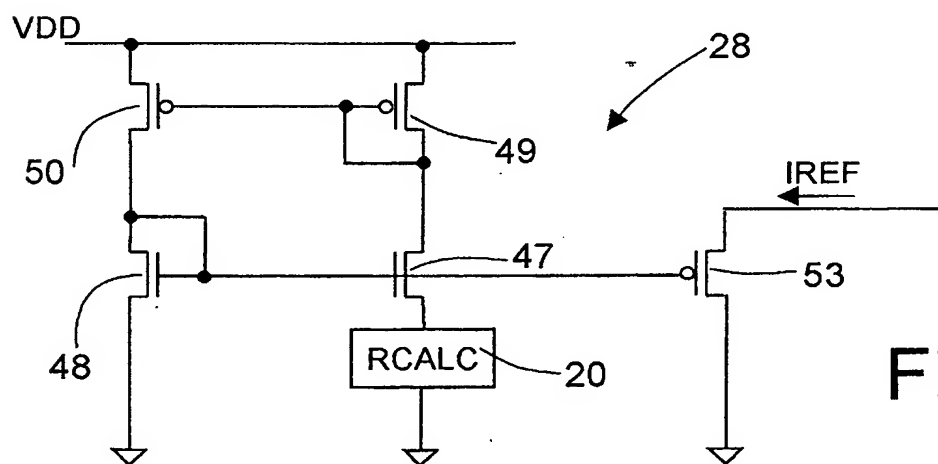


Fig.14

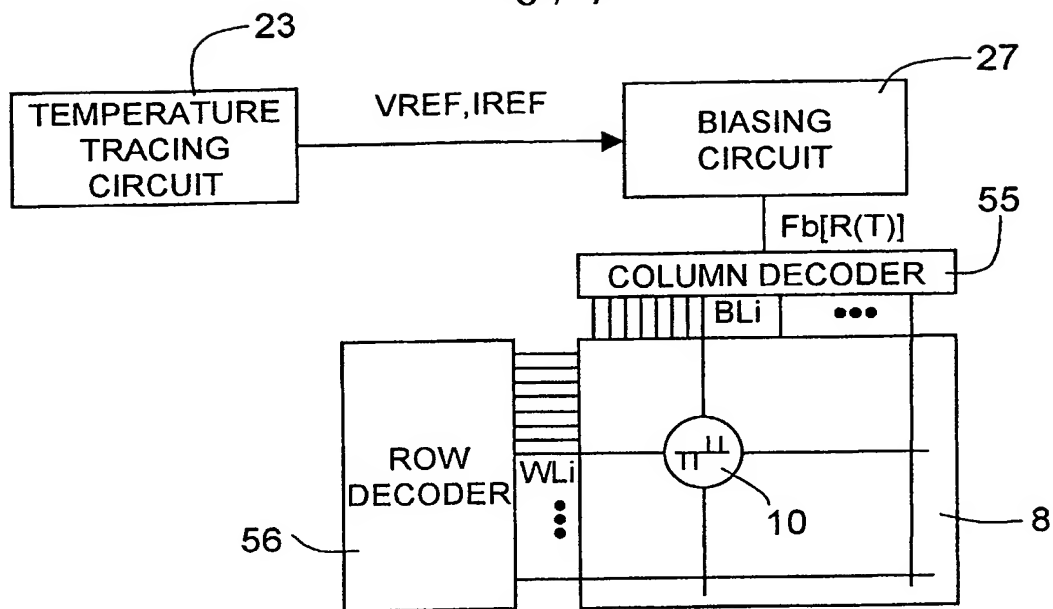


Fig.15

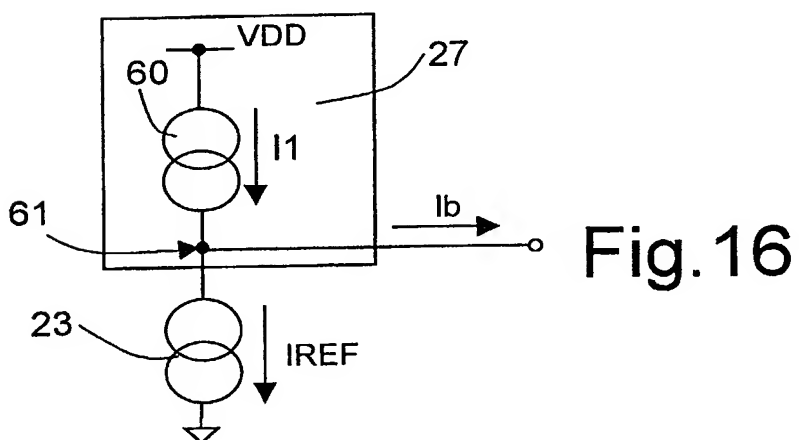


Fig.16

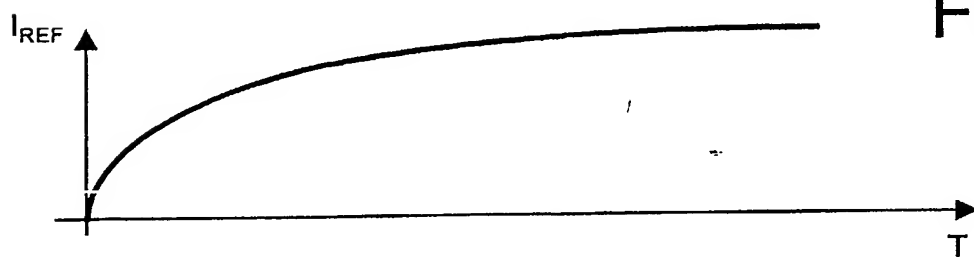


Fig.17

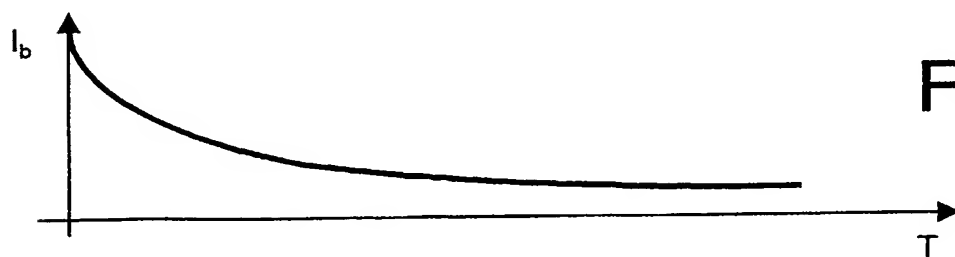


Fig.18

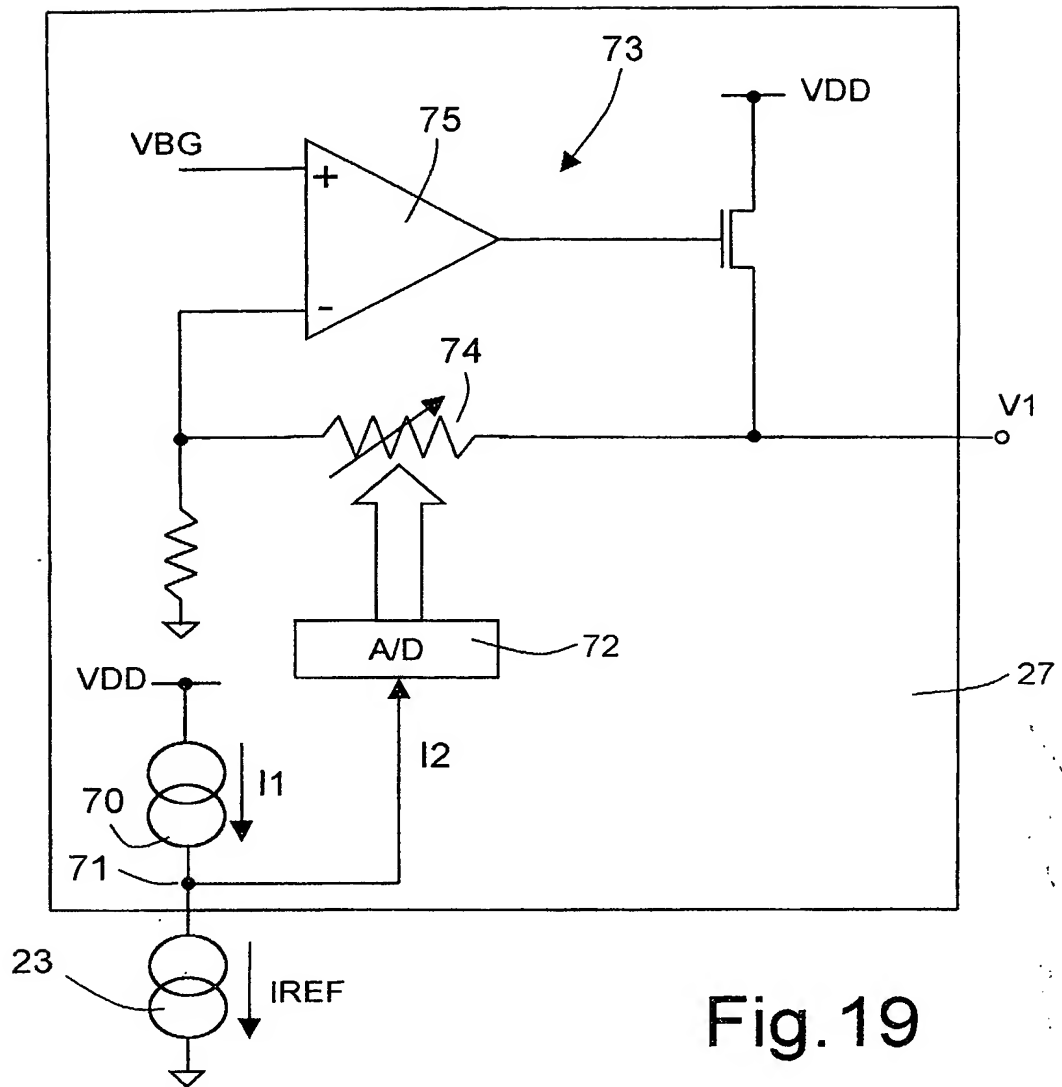


Fig.19

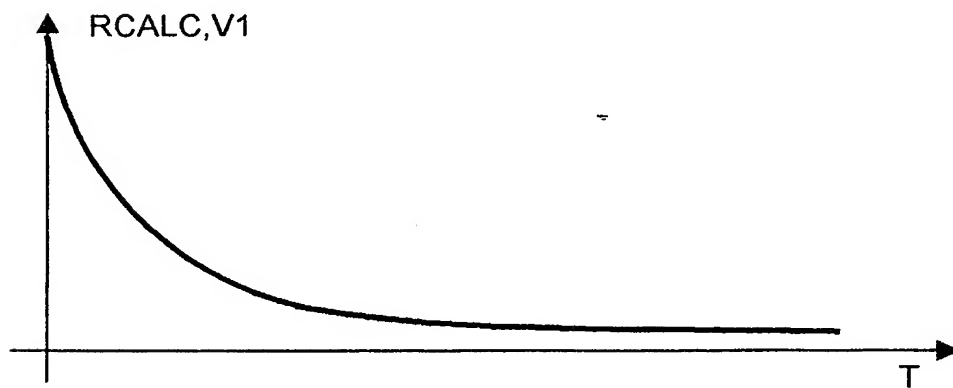


Fig.20

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